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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to determine the effectiveness of writing assignments in basal reading series and the extent to which teachers used the suggested writing assignments, four fifth grade teachers of reading and their classes were observed for 10 days. Although participants reported that they regularly included written composition in reading instruction, results of the study indicated that three of the four participants followed none of the basal suggestions and that one participant employed some of the basal writing suggestions. Examination of the basal reading series revealed that although reading lessons did contain suggestions that might result in writing, the majority of writing activities were located in the enrichment section of the lessons. In addition, most lesson plan suggestions for writing activities did not state explicitly that the activity should be written; the teacher's manual provided little instruction for the teacher that would aid in guiding students through the writing process; and no suggestions for evaluating students' writing were contained in the writing suggestions. The four participants were consistent in their beliefs that students receive writing instruction in other classes such as English and spelling and that writing was not their responsibility as reading teachers.

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WRITING SUGGESTIONS IN BASAL READING SERIES AND THE
EXTENT TEACHERS FOLLOW BASAL SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to identify the nature and extent of writing suggestions in the basal reading series and the extent teachers used the suggestions. Participants were four experienced fifth grade teachers of reading who had reported including written composition in their reading instruction regularly.

Qualitative research methods were used in the collection and analysis of data. Observations revealed that the participants included little writing instruction in their reading curriculum and that the basal reading series seemed to have little effect on the inclusion of writing or on writing instruction in reading lessons. Basal reading teachers' manuals contained suggestions for writing, but these were contained primarily in the enrichment sections and did not follow recommendations for teaching writing as a process.

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RATIONALE

Without question, reading and writing are part of language. Because reading and writing are thought to incorporate many of the same abilities, the development in one area will likely increase proficiency in the other. Although the relationship has not been proven causal, the integration of reading and writing seems logical, in fact necessary, for efficient learning in both areas.

The purpose of this study was to identify the extent that reading and writing are being integrated in reading classrooms. The study focused on the extent and nature of writing suggestions in basal reading series and teachers' use of basal writing suggestions.

Because theorists and researchers are campaigning for the integration of reading and writing, reasons as to why classroom practice is or is not reflecting this push should be identified so that teacher educators and authors of methods texts can decide if it is necessary to alter current methods and procedures. Teacher educators, administrators, supervisors, and textbook publishers might benefit from the findings which reveal information about the use of basal reading materials and classroom writing practices.

PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

The participants in the study were four fifth grade teachers of reading who reported that they regularly included written composition in reading instruction. Participants and their reading classes were observed for 10 consecutive days including the days on which their classes visited the system's Writing Center. Qualitative research methods were used in the collection of data in the form of a survey, field notes, audio tapes, participant and student interview guides, personal conversations, and telephone conversations. Primary data sources were observer field notes and transcripts of participants' interview responses.

Analysis of Writing Suggestions in Basal Reading Series

The lessons in the teachers' manuals used during the time of the observations were examined for writing activities. Because this study focused on a particular type of writing, only activities that met the researcher's definition of writing were analyzed. For the purpose of this study, writing was defined as the process of preparing for, recording, revising, and editing the ideas that come from within a person and are developed by and through written expression. Writing suggestions in the basal were categorized by level, by location in the lesson, by activity, and by whether writing was possible, implied, or specified. Furthermore, the extent to which the basal series followed a process approach for teaching writing was

examined. When other materials were used in the reading classrooms, those were also analyzed based on the above criteria.

RESULTS

Writing Suggestions in the Basal Reading Series

The findings regarding the extent and nature of writing activities in the basal reading series were similar among those lessons used by the participants. The reading lessons did contain suggestions that might result in writing. The majority of writing activities were located in the enrichment section of the lessons in the teacher's manuals (Jacoby, 1984; Howard, unpublished paper, 1986). These are the least used portions of the basal lessons (Rosecky, 1978; Heathington & Alexander, 1984). The placement of writing activities in the enrichment sections seem to indicate to teachers that writing is a low priority item in their basal series--to be done only when time allows.

Furthermore, most lesson plan suggestions for writing activities did not state explicitly that the activity should be written. Lack of preciseness in the suggestions could be confusing for teachers. Nevertheless, when writing activities were suggested, the basal teacher's manual provided little instruction for the teacher that would aid in guiding students through the writing process.

Some suggestions were given, however, for activities that would help the students prior to writing. No

instructions or suggestions were given to help students during writing. Furthermore, the few follow-up suggestions were limited to sharing compositions orally or displaying them on a bulletin board. No suggestions for evaluating students' writing were contained in the writing suggestions given in the lesson plans of the basal reader manuals. These findings parallel those of Graves (1977) and Bridge and Hiebert (1985) who reported that language arts texts provided little instruction in teaching writing as a process.

Though some writing suggestions were included in the basal series, few of the suggestions could stem from students' personal experiences. Also, although the writing suggestions were often based on the story selection, no attempts were made to relate reading and writing or to show how writing could be used to develop comprehension or any other reading skill.

Extent Teachers Followed Basal Suggestions for Writing

Three of the four participants followed none of the basal suggestions for writing in their reading lessons. Only one participant employed some of the basal writing suggestions. She adapted them and even revised some basal activities that had not been categorized as writing suggestions by the researcher.

Participants' beliefs seemed most significant in the lack of writing and writing instruction included in the

reading classroom. Areas that seemed relevant to their beliefs were participants' broad definition of writing, their limited knowledge of the process approach and its purpose, their belief that students receive writing instruction in other classes such as English and spelling, their belief that writing was not their responsibility as reading teachers, and their beliefs about district guidelines and requirements. All of the aforementioned areas seemed to correlate and thus strongly inhibit the amount of writing and writing instruction in the reading classroom. Considering participants' current teaching responsibilities and their beliefs, it seems that to incorporate writing into the reading curriculum would be futile, unless teachers' beliefs, training, and time allocations are changed.

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